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# Private Role Increasing In Foreign War Actions

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 11 — In the last four years, with the public blessing of the Reagan Administration and perhaps its covert support, a network of private citizens made up of former military men and anti-Communist political groups have taken an increasing role in foreign military operations.

Congressional sources, private analysts and interviews with some of those involved with the private operations themselves provide evidence of an Administration program to "privatize" covert military operations in Central America in the face of growing Congressional opposition, particularly over the last two years, to Central Intelligence Agency activities there.

The extent of private-sector involvement in Central America has surfaced dramatically twice in the last two years, first in September 1984 when a helicopter flown by two American veterans belonging to an Alabama-based organization then called Civilian Military Assistance, was shot down over Nicaragua, killing the two pilots.

The group, led by Tom Posey, a former Marine corporal and Vietnam veteran, said it had 1,000 members, who, Mr. Posey said, had contributed \$3 million in "nonmilitary" aid to Nicaraguan rebels based in Honduras.

## 'Quite in Line,' Reagan Says

In the wake of that incident, President Reagan said that such private operations to support the Administration policy of overthrowing the Government of Nicaragua were "quite in line with what has been a pretty well established tradition in our country" and that he would "not be inclined to interfere."

The almost identical downing in Nicaragua this week of an aging C-123 cargo plane with an American crew and loaded with automatic rifles, ammunition and other military gear destined for the contras, again underscored the extent of private involvement, but continued to raise questions of how removed it is from the Administration.

Mr. Reagan approved the private warfare operation by likening it to the involvement of Americans who joined the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in Spain in the 1930's to fight Franco. "We're in a free country where private citizens have a great many freedoms," the President said.

But United States officials from the White House to the Pentagon vigorously denied any Government involvement in the rebel resupply operation, maintaining it was an entirely private affair. The person running it, Government sources said privately, was a retired general, John K. Singlaub.

## General Denies a Role

General Singlaub, an expert in counterinsurgency and what he himself describes as "low-intensity warfare," has since 1981 been identified with the extensive network of private support for the Nicaraguan rebel effort.

In telephone interviews and at a news conference here, however, the general denied any involvement, and said he had no idea why the Administration "would want to put out this misinformation" on the matter.

But both General Singlaub and another high-ranking former officer involved in the private military support network — a retired Air Force general, Harry C. Aderholt — have on at least one occasion since their retirement acted as advisers to the Pentagon on unconventional warfare and counterinsurgency techniques.

General Aderholt, 66 years old, heads a group of some 1,500 former — and a few active — airmen called the Air Commando Association, headquartered near Eglund Air Force Base in the Florida panhandle.

The organization is chiefly made up of former members of the Air Force's Air Commandos, the Air Force equivalent of the Special Forces in the Vietnam War era.

## He Criticized Carter

General Singlaub was removed from his post as chief of staff in South Korea in 1979 for publicly criticizing Carter Administration plans to cut the American presence there.

The general returned to the United States and formed the United States Council for World Freedom, the American affiliate of an international organization called the World Anti-Communist League, which he now also heads.

Through various other conservative organizations in the United States and abroad, the Singlaub groups have collected from \$10 million to \$12 million in what they insist is nonlethal aid to the contra rebels.

One of the groups working with General Singlaub is the General Aderholt Air Commandos, who say they have distributed some \$3 million in medical aid to Central America, chiefly to Guatemalan Indians.

## Called 'Resupply Operation'

Reached by telephone at his headquarters in Florida, General Aderholt said that his organization had no part in the operation that led to the crash in Nicaragua this week and that he had no idea who did.

He said, however, that it was clearly "a resupply operation."

As to his role as an adviser to the Pentagon, he said his last meeting was "quite a while ago."

The last known meeting with the Pentagon involving Generals Singlaub and Aderholt was in May 1984, when they took part, along with other ranking military experts, on counterinsurgency techniques, in an eight-member panel application of such techniques to conflicts in Central America.

Chairman of the panel was Fred C. Ikle, Undersecretary of Defense for policy matters.

According to General Aderholt's Pentagon biography, he was instrumental in developing strategic airfield sites "used throughout Southeast Asia as support sites for special warfare operations" in the 1960's.

He retired from active duty in 1973, but was recalled for a another stint in

the mid-1970's in Thailand before again returning to civilian status in the late 70's.

Congressional and other critics of the private involvement in the Nicaraguan conflict say that it is little more than an Administration ploy to evade the Congressional cutoff of aid to the rebels two years ago.

According to that view, shared by among others Senator John F. Kerry, Democrat of Massachusetts, who is a member of the Foreign Relations Committee, there have been violations not only of Congressional intent but of the Neutrality Act, which bars private aid in the prosecution of any foreign war against any nation with which the nation is at peace. Inasmuch as there has never been a declaration of war, Mr. Kerry and others maintain, the private aid operations are illegal.

Moreover, senior Administration officials and members of Congress disclosed a year ago that the contras have been receiving direct military advice from an official on the National Security Council, Lieut. Col. Oliver North. Gen. Singlaub acknowledged conferring with Colonel North on the matter of aid to the contras.